

Introduction to “Something Different: Lunar Sabbaths – The Revised Edition”

What exactly *are* “lunar Sabbaths”? When and by whom did this doctrine originate? The first question is answered in great detail in chapter one of this study, but for those who would like a quick summary definition of lunar Sabbaths, here’s one that we hope you find helpful: Lunar sabbaths, in layman's terms, are Sabbaths that are based on the lunar cycle instead of the continuously-repeating weekly cycle with which most of us are familiar. Thus, if there is a new moon on, say, a Monday, the weekly Sabbath that month will fall on Mondays. The following new moon day may fall on a Tuesday. If so, the weekly Sabbath will be observed on Tuesdays that month. As you can see from this pattern, lunar sabbaths are dependent upon the lunar cycle, and can thus fall on any day of the week, from Sunday to Saturday. That’s pretty much it in a nutshell. For those of you who, like us, need visual aids, we provide detailed calendar samples illustrating how this works in chapter 1.

With regard to questions pertaining to the origin of lunar Sabbaths, lunar sabbatarians would be quick to answer something along the line of, “Genesis chapter one.” If only it were that easy! Since the phrase “lunar Sabbaths” never appears in Scripture, nor is there a verse instructing any of Yahweh’s children to use the moon when reckoning the Sabbath, we have to utilize a more methodical approach. Can we start from the present and go back in time to trace the origin of lunar Sabbaths to Genesis chapter one, or do we need to go back that far?

June and I were probably first exposed to the thought process behind the observance of lunar Sabbaths back in 1987. That’s when we were invited to a meeting conducted by a group of white supremacists who had come to the conclusion that there was something to this thing about observing the Torah. The main speaker for this meeting was a man named Arnold Burns, who is from the state of Georgia. The meeting was held in a town by the name of Bowen, Illinois. Although he could not have been classified as a lunar sabbatarian, Mr. Burns nevertheless presented reasoning that I find typical of the reasoning offered for the observance of lunar Sabbaths. According to Mr. Burns, the “Scriptural” method of determining the “true weekly Sabbath” centers on the date of Pentecost. If Pentecost should happen to fall on a Wednesday, then the weekly Sabbath will also fall on Wednesdays for the next 12 months.

Some ten or eleven years later, I was officially introduced to the doctrine of lunar Sabbaths. A lunar sabbatarian named John Ouwenga, whom we had known for nearly a year, finally broke the news to me after our regular weekly Sabbath meeting had ended. In a private conversation, he “spilled the beans” that the day on which we were gathered wasn’t “really” the true weekly Sabbath. According to Mr. Ouwenga, the “true” weekly Sabbaths fall on the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days of each moon. Only a few years later, I attended a debate between a lunar sabbatarian from Georgia by the name of Arnold and a fellow Texan named Herb Solinsky. No, the man named Arnold was not the same Arnold we had met in Bowen, Illinois ... but ironically this Arnold’s last name is Bowen. Later that year I met Arnold’s son-in-law, Matthew Janzen, at the 2001 Unity Conference held in Cisco, Texas, where Matthew presented the doctrine of lunar Sabbaths. Although Arnold conducted himself in a very respectable and polite manner at the debate I attended, Mr. Solinsky, in my opinion, successfully refuted each point that Arnold raised. Similarly, in spite of Matthew Janzen’s noble conduct at the Unity Conference, he failed to satisfactorily address the objections of those who questioned him afterwards. These, of course, are my personal observations, which both Mr. Bowen and Mr. Janzen may disagree with.

A year later, a friend named Frank Brown from Clarksville, Arkansas, who puts out a newsletter entitled *Search the Scriptures*, contacted me. Aware of my exposure to lunar sabbatarians, Frank asked if I could contribute a short article to his newsletter, especially since his daughter had been inquiring into whether or not there was something to the lunar Sabbath doctrine. Finding it difficult to compose a brief article when the internet studies I had been reading were at least ten pages long, Frank consented to allow me to just keep it as brief as I could. The result was a 22-page study which was formatted into a booklet that he inserted in his March-April 2003 newsletter. We titled that booklet “Something Different: Lunar Sabbaths.” The rest is history!

I’m under the impression that several individuals on Frank’s mailing list must be lunar sabbatarians because once the dust settled after mailing out his newsletter, we began receiving letters, e-mails and phone calls from lunar sabbatarians. Eventually, we had a few letter exchanges with Arnold and Matthew, which developed into a cassette tape “letter” exchange ... and then I was invited to join a group e-mail discussion about lunar Sabbaths, which was later moved to an online forum called the “True Sabbath” forum, located at www.elijah.com.

By now, I could tell I was becoming very familiar with lunar sabbatarian doctrine, and I was beginning to sense that I was dealing with people who were already sold on this teaching no matter what evidence they would be presented to the contrary. I realize this is an easy statement to make, so I do not expect anyone to “just believe” me, and I certainly know that lunar sabbatarians feel the same way about me! In spite of my personal observation, I somehow remained a participant in the “True Sabbath” forum for over three years, during which time I believe I heard every argument in the book. Although I had a strong sense that lunar sabbatarian doctrine is laced with deception, I did my best to remain open to the possibility that lunar sabbatarians might come up with something which might persuade me to accept their position. Over time, however, I grew less and less patient with the lunar sabbatarians’ approach, including Arnold Bowen’s frequent habit of re-submitting old arguments over and over again as though they had never been addressed before, as well as his knack for taking my words, then re-tooling them so as to promote lunar Sabbaths. From time to time he would also misrepresent my words, and in spite of my protests, he persisted in his mischaracterizations, which did nothing to draw me any closer to accepting his position. At one point he even submitted a posting with the caption “**Brother Larry Believes Lunar Sabbaths.**”¹ This was the same Arnold Bowen who had seemed so respectful of others at the debate I had attended, so I realized I was witnessing another side to this man.

In the meantime, I found myself in the middle of repeated negative exchanges with lunar sabbatarian Eric Bess, whom I found to not only be one of the most disagreeable individuals I have ever dealt with, but the “last straw” was when I found him to also be dishonest. Accusing someone of dishonesty is a very serious charge, and some would counsel me to at least reduce the charge to one of “forgetfulness,” but there are times when you “know what you know,” and I know that Mr. Bess was dishonest when he claimed he had e-mailed me a response to our commentary about the *Bene Israel*, an isolated clan of Jews discovered in India in the 1700’s. The *Bene Israel* is a very significant group of Jews who claim to be descendants of seven Jewish families who fled persecution from Judea during the 2nd century BCE, but were shipwrecked off the coast of India and began their new lives there. The *Bene Israel* intermarried with the Indian natives, but retained their Jewish customs, including circumcision, dietary laws, and observance of the weekly Sabbath ... on the day commonly known as *Saturday*. You can imagine that

¹ This quotation is taken from EliYah’s Forums (www.elijah.com), the “True Sabbath” private forum, posted by Arnold Bowen under the screen name “emjanzen” on 02-09-2007 at 04:50 AM in the thread entitled “**Are all Moedim Moon-related? (contd).**”

lunar sabbatarians will do their best to discredit the *Bene Israel*, and that's what Eric Bess claims he did – in an e-mail reply which he insists that he had sent me. During the internet forum exchange that we had, Mr. Bess adamantly claimed to have sent me a refutation of my *Bene Israel* commentary, adding that my failure to respond proved my lack of a defense. Of course, it is difficult to respond to a refutation that you are never allowed to read in the first place! Nevertheless, here is an excerpt of Eric's reply concerning this matter:

In the email exchange last year I **DID** respond to your bogus Bene Israel claim. I have no way to retrieve the email I sent and therefore no proof, but I know what I did. **And the fact that you call me a liar only comforts me.**

It proves that you don't have a defense for my response and are therefore choosing to claim that I didn't respond so you don't have to answer. The same way you have done in this forum many times.

Instead of addressing the issue, you find some way to attack, and thus avoid having to face the responsibility of an answer. After which, you accuse lunar sabbatarians of doing the same.

So instead of answering the Bene Israel issues you have been presented with on this forum, you want to make an issue about whether or not I responded to you in AUGUST! You should be ashamed of yourself.²

What Eric didn't know is the fact that I rarely delete e-mails (unless my computer crashes!) I still had the two e-mails he had sent me several months earlier, neither of which contained a refutation of our *Bene Israel* commentary. When I requested that he produce the missing e-mail, he explained that he couldn't find it, yet he knew he had sent it, and how dare that I insinuate otherwise? In spite of suggestions that he reproduce the argument right there in the forum, the rebuttal never materialized.³ Later, when the discussion dwindled to only one other non-lunar sabbatarian participant, that individual expressed the view that I should regard the matter as "water under the bridge" instead of sharing my position that Eric should either "put up or shut up."⁴ At that point, I decided it was time to pull out of the forum. Not that

² This quotation is taken from EliYah's Forums (www.elyah.com), the "True Sabbath" private forum, posted by Eric Bess (under the screen name "elbessr") on February 9, 2007 at 10:36 AM in the thread entitled "**Debunking Larry's Book**," page 11.

³ For example, Glenn Moore had already requested a response from Eric to my comments pertaining to the *Bene Israel*, citing the fact that Eric had already made a critical error in dating when the *Bene Israel* fled Palestine. In a posting submitted on 02-03-2007 at 06:27 PM in the EliYah's Forums thread entitled "**Debunking Larry's Book**," page 8, Glenn wrote the following: "I am anxious, though, to see your response to Larry's extensive statements regarding the Bene Israel. I realize you and Larry are at odds right now, but I would really care less--I am only interested in finding the truth. So if you can produce that response, we would all like to see it. I am especially interested in why you did not correct your error when you said the Bene Israel came to India in about 200 CE, when in fact all the evidence available to us shows they came in about 200 BCE? To me, this makes a great deal of difference, since this is about 200 years BEFORE the Messiah came--and validates the keeping of a continuous weekly cycle at that time." Eric's response to Glenn, submitted three days later (02-06-2007 at 09:28 PM), is as follows: "Both you and Larry are entitled to your opinions. I have my opinions regarding the so-called 'Bene Israel' evidence, but as I have previously stated, it is pointless to debate this issue or any other with him. And in the light of your apparent admiration for his every word, I'll just leave you to believe whatever he says." Suffice it to say that Eric never produced anything resembling a rebuttal.

⁴ His exact words were, "As for whether Eric was 'less than honest', i would rather not take time to backtrack, so let's call that 'water under the bridge', and let us all try to be honest from here on. And if it becomes necessary to point out someone's dishonesty (or other accusations), let's be sure it really is NECESSARY, and relevant, and backed up by FACTS. I kinda look at it like gossip; even if it's true, is it NECESSARY?" This posting was submitted by "chuckbaldwin" on 02-09-2007 at 02:10 AM in the EliYah's Forums thread entitled "**Are all Moedim Moon-related? (contd).**" I would respond to Chuck that it becomes necessary to point out a person's dishonesty when the person who is dishonest claims that I didn't respond to what he had written because I "don't have a defense."

I'm expecting special treatment from anyone, because I'm not, but I nevertheless realize that when the one guy insists I never replied to his rebuttal – which I had never received in the first place – and the other guy expects me to just drop the matter, there's really no point in continuing the discussion. Then, to avoid further misrepresentations of things I had written by lunar sabbatarians, I decided to remove all of the postings I had submitted to the forum, officially making my final exit on February 17, 2007.

This, in a nutshell, is a summary of my experiences with lunar sabbatarians. Although our original February 2003 study consisted of only 22 pages, by June of the same year it had ballooned to over 100 pages, due to the need we felt to respond to various lunar sabbatarian protests. As a result of my three-year stint in the “True Sabbath” forum, I have decided to compile a much more detailed revision in which I address further claims raised in that forum by lunar sabbatarians. Over the course of the discussion with lunar sabbatarians, I believe I began to get a more in-depth feel for how lunar sabbatarians think, as well as the type of person who would fall for such a teaching. In fact, a friend once brought an acquaintance to our Sukkot gathering. When the acquaintance began expressing the belief that we should wear phylacteries in addition to his conviction that the Holy Spirit is a woman, I plainly told him that he was a good candidate for becoming a lunar sabbatarian. Within a year, he was a lunar sabbatarian. While I'm not trying to say I am an expert at spotting potential lunar sabbatarians, I will comment that I have found that the primary candidates for lunar sabbatarian practice and belief include individuals harboring an intense distrust for anything associated with Judaism. Other typical characteristics include a lack of trust in the accuracy of the historical record, gullibility, and an insatiable desire to be different from anything that might be construed as “mainstream.” I'm not saying that we should necessarily embrace anything considered “mainstream,” but I *am* saying we should be careful to only reject the parts that can be proven false instead of approaching a matter with the “guilty before proven innocent” slant.

Where Did This Teaching Come From, Anyway?!

In the “True Sabbath” forum, I clashed with such individuals as Arnold Bowen, Matthew Janzen, Troy Miller, Eric Bess and Joey Thompson. There were many others involved who preferred to not only withhold their identity, but they also seemed to prefer to not share how long they had been observing lunar Sabbaths or who had taught it to them⁵. Matthew Janzen, for example, had promised his teacher that he would not reveal his identity. Eric Bess, after much prodding, finally stated that he learned of lunar Sabbaths from a man named Babacar N'yokde Mocombe, who is from Africa.⁶ I cannot find any information on Babacar N'yokde Mocombe, so I have no idea where *he* learned of lunar sabbaths, and when I asked Eric for more details, my request was ignored. Nevertheless, I believe I have identified the individual who first came up with the idea that our Creator intends for His children to determine the weekly Sabbath based upon the lunar cycle. His name is Jonathan David Brown from Springfield, Missouri. According to Wikipedia, Jonathan David Brown, a record producer and audio engineer for Christian music, was sentenced to a Federal prison term in 1992 for activities related to a white

⁵ Arnold Bowen will not disclose who taught him about lunar Sabbaths, but on July 5, 2005 he expressed that he had been observing lunar Sabbaths for six or seven years, which would indicate that he likely began observing lunar Sabbaths in 1998. This came from a posting that he submitted in the “True Sabbath” online forum, a forum that was set up by the site owner at www.eliyah.com. The name of the forum thread where Arnold contributed this posting is a thread that I started entitled “**Modern History of Lunar Sabbath Movement.**” Two years later (on July 10, 2007, in the thread entitled “**Looking for facts**”), Arnold remarked, “I have been keeping lunar Sabbaths around nine or so years.”

⁶ These confessions were all made in the “True Sabbath” online forum set up by the site owner at www.eliyah.com. The forum thread is one that I started titled “**Modern History of Lunar Sabbath Movement.**” Eric Bess' identification of the man named Babacar N'yokde Mocombe was offered in a posting that he submitted on 01-13-2007 at 08:18 PM.

supremacist organization, which Mr. Brown refers to as his “Federal Sabbatical.”⁷ I realize that many lunar sabbatarians will not appreciate our reference to Jonathan David Brown’s prison record, and I can understand why they would not. In presenting this information, I believe I should emphasize that I refuse to allow a person's past mistakes to influence my understanding of truth; however, at the same time, if there are obvious errors mingled with esoteric interpretations of isolated texts of Scripture, that individual's past can serve to identify a potential catalyst leading him to arrive at those errors. Are the same errors in judgment that influenced his decision to commit a crime somehow related to the decision-making process used in crafting lunar sabbath theology?

It was after his release from prison that Jonathan David Brown published what I believe is the original study promoting the belief that Yahweh ordained the observance of lunar Sabbaths. It is entitled *Keeping Yahweh’s Appointments*, which can be purchased for \$10.00 plus shipping and handling by anyone who wishes to contribute towards the distribution of additional copies. Since we were not interested in investing our money this way, June and I chose to do without Mr. Brown’s study, and when I first composed this introduction (July 2007), I had not read Mr. Brown’s book. However, when a friend heard that I had not read the study, he very kindly mailed me a copy. In the study, which was originally published in 1998, Mr. Brown attempts to train the reader’s attention on his belief that the observance of lunar Sabbaths forms an integral part of man’s need to return to nature, or as he terms it, a “Return to Natural Law.” Mr. Brown claims to have arrived at this understanding by “prophetic revelation,” as found in the following excerpt:

With that in mind, I tell you that Yahweh’s people are destined to return to *all* of His Natural Laws which were not **added** to merely **atone** for sin. It is my *prophetic revelation* that this is part of what is referred to as “the restitution of all things.” Acts 3:21.⁸

Confirmation that the observance of lunar Sabbaths plays no small role in Mr. Brown’s version of “the restitution of all things” is discerned by reading the following remark:

It was becoming more apparent to me that the “seven-day cycle” of the week was not even in line with the pagan Julian calendar months, January through December. Birthdays fall on a different day of the week each year, don’t they? At some point thereafter I heard the still small voice say, “the weekly sabbath is in the quarters of the moon where all the other feast days are.” I followed the voice.”⁹

What voice did Jonathan David Brown hear? We are hopeful that each of us, including Jonathan David Brown, understands that there is such a thing as the “wrong voice,” as King Ahab learned the hard way.¹⁰ It is up to us to diligently research this matter, and we must be careful about the “voices” we listen to. Neither June nor I have heard any “still small voices,” influencing our decisions. While we pray to

⁷ From Wikipedia article entitled: “Jonathan David Brown,” located at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_David_Brown. By 2010, Mr. Brown’s biography, including details about his prison term, had been greatly expanded. Of interest to our study is the following notation: “Jonathan David Brown was the first sabbath keeper in the 20th century to begin the practice of counting the Sabbath from the New Moon day rather than using the modern seven day week. He published the book *Keeping Yahweh's Appointments* in 1998, which explained the practice. The Lunar Sabbath movement has grown among the Messianic Judaism, Armstrong/Worldwide Church of God and Christian Identity movements.”

⁸ From *Keeping Yahweh’s Appointments*, by Jonathan David Brown, Springfield, Missouri, 1998, p. 6.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 49.

¹⁰ The prophet Micaiah, in I Kings 22:19-23, revealed that a lying spirit was speaking through a prophet who claimed to represent the Almighty. That prophet [wrongly] prophesied that King Ahab would emerge victorious in a battle against Ramoth-gilead. King Ahab was ultimately killed in the battle (vs. 34-35). The Apostle John also cautioned us against listening to the wrong “voice” in I John 4:1: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of the Almighty: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”

Yahweh for guidance, we are nevertheless left with only His Word, combined with the evidence from history, to influence our understanding of truth.

That Jonathan David Brown's study is the original study promoting the observance of lunar Sabbaths can be gleaned from fellow lunar sabbatarian Ernie L. Hoch's website, where he offers various lunar Sabbath articles, including ordering information for Brown's *Keeping Yahweh's Appointments*. In offering Mr. Brown's study, Ernie Hoch introduces it with the following caption: "**Here's where it all begins.**" Certainly, then, Ernie L. Hoch regards Jonathan David Brown as the originator of the teaching that Yahweh's children should be observing lunar Sabbaths. To the best of our knowledge, this makes Jonathan David Brown the first individual since the time of the ancient Babylonians to promote the observance of lunar Sabbaths. Here is a screen shot from a page at Ernie L. Hoch's website illustrating his understanding of the original modern-day lunar sabbatarian:¹¹

Additional Lunar Sabbath Articles	
Conclusive Evidence that the True Scriptural Shabbat is Reckoned by the Moon	The Burning Question - Sabbath - When Is It?
University Study shows Sweds observe Lunar Based Rest	Die Brennende Frage - Wann Ist Schabbat?
Here's where it all begins: Book: Keeping Yahweh's Appointments \$10.00 Author: Jonathan David Brown (A must read)	Quote from the Universal Jewish Encyclopedia under "Holidays", page 410: The New Moon is still, and the Sabbath originally was, dependent upon the lunar cycle.
Follow That Cloud Ministry CreationCalendar.com	The Case For a Lunar Based Sabbath, (7th Day Adventist)
http://www.lunarsabbath.org	When Was Yahshua's Resurrection? (according to the scriptures)
Identifying the 7th day of Yahweh's Calendar	A Quest For Created Answers
Regarding Abib	Testimony from a first time Lunar Sabbath keeper
From Sabbath to Saturday: The Story of the Jewish Rest Day	Have We Been Observing the Sabbath At the Wrong Time All These Years?
Mysteries of Babylon and Pagan Sabbaths	Nimrod's Tabernacle of Saturn
	The Original Hebrew Sabbath

Now that we see where the modern-day lunar Sabbath movement traces its roots, we can expect lunar sabbatarians to assert that they are simply resurrecting a lost truth because, as they claim, time has been lost. Of course, June and I do not share their belief, but it is nevertheless important to our quest for truth that we investigate this matter for ourselves because, in the end, what matters most is that we have been faithful to that which we believe to be true. If we do not seriously pursue truth, however, that "faith" is an empty faith. Back when June and I worshipped on Sunday, we did it with our whole hearts, being faithful to what we believed was true. Just because we now worship on a different day does not mean that we should ignore those who claim we should be observing lunar Sabbaths. We have listened to their claims, and we were patient for a time, but as I mentioned earlier, the time has come to compile all of our findings, based on our own research, combined with discussions with lunar sabbatarians, and above all,

¹¹ The screen shot we reference here is taken from the following URL:
<http://www.lunarsabbath.com/>.

based on our love for Yahweh and the truth of His Word. We encourage everyone out there to study this out for themselves, not taking anyone's word for anything, but relying on the pure truth of Scripture, combined with the evidence from the record of history.

The three-year forum discussion I was involved in covered many items not included in our original study, such as "The Jericho Battle March," "Do We Worship *Satyr*?" "Stranded on a Deserted Island," "Does Deuteronomy 5:15 Prove An Abib 15 Sabbath?" "Is There a 'No Trade' Restriction on the Day of the New Moon?" "The International Dateline," "How the Hebrew Scholars Who Translated the Septuagint Could Not Have Been Lunar Sabbatarians," "A Weekly Sabbath Observed by the Apostle Shaul," "Why You Can't Find 'Saturday' in the Bible," "Jews Isolated for a Millennium: The *Bene Israel*," "Addressing the 'Pinpointed Weekly Sabbaths' Claim," and so much more. Our ongoing efforts to build on our original study will eventually include chapters addressing each of these topics, and we invite you to share in our quest for truth by reading along, not because we expect you to take our word for it, but because we encourage you to approach this and all matters of spiritual importance from every possible angle, including ours! In this study, we define lunar Sabbaths, while offering our Scriptural perspective and delving into the historical record. Of course, much of this study is devoted to responding to the many claims promoted by lunar sabbatarians. It has grown into a very extensive and intense study, which is why we recommend taking things slowly ... one chapter at a time. Yahweh's truth will prevail in the end ... may each of us be found practicing and believing **truth**, not deception! May Yahweh bless your study of His Word and may He guide us all into His truth!